

WATSON, JOHN C.

MANUSCRIPTS

SPEECHES

71.2007.085.05793



# Speeches Honoring Abraham Lincoln

John C. Watson

From the files of the  
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection  
(formerly referenced as Manuscript Files)

ADDRESS of JOHN C. WATSON at Amsterdam, N. Y.,

on February 12th, 1948.

Fellow Americans,

On this occasion, I want to talk about Abraham Lincoln whose words resound as loudly and clearly today as in the Gettysburg Address that "this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom."

Three generations ago, the great issue before the American people was freedom. The whole world anxiously waited for America to answer the question of whether we had the capacity for self-government and to establish the supremacy of human rights over property rights. Lincoln met the issue squarely, saved the Union, and revitalized this republic by giving new life to the meaning of those sacred words, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal. They are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights; that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

Now, more than ever, Lincoln stands before us as one seeking the aid and guidance of the Almighty and giving sympathy and leadership to all people, regardless of race, creed or color. He was, in truth, the symbol of the moral law and the world's great champion of the brotherhood of man. He is revered wherever the human tongue is spoken. His faith, courage, tolerance, patience, his belief



in representative government and the manner in which he gave expression to those attributes, will forever stand as beacon-lights to guide this nation.

Every generation can profit by the contemplation of his example, his moral strength and his high principles. They are still the sovereign remedies for a civilization that is sick and a world that is desperate. Justice, equality and fair play were what he stood for. Within those principles, lies the solution of most of our troubles. They can, if we will let them, revolutionize the outlook and illuminate the future of the human race.

When we speak of Lincoln, we speak with utmost reverence. The fifty-six years of his life were the formative years of this republic. It began as the revolutionary years ended. He faced trials as severe as ours, and conquered them with little indeed to work with. We need not dwell on the hopelessness of the environment out of which Lincoln came. That story is familiar to all of us. The Lincoln legend has never lost its influence on American thought. James Russell Lowell once said that he came "as God made Adam, of the very earth, unancestored, unprivileged, unknown."

This Savior of our Republic was the foremost of statesmen, towering high among the geniuses of the world; the plainest, and most honest of mortals; the most dignified, the most humorous, the most serious, the most sad of men, and the most gentle of human beings. In all history, there will never be found another so great and so single-hearted in his devotion to the welfare of all the people. He worked and suffered for them, and, when he had lived for them to noble purpose, he gave his life in the end.

He came from the ranks of the common people. His strength lay in the fact that he remained at all times one of them. He once said, "God must have loved the plain people for He made so many of them;" and, again, "I have faith in the people. Let them know the truth and the country is safe."



All the way he faced obstacles. Treachery was all around him. Yet, he knew no bitterness. In his own words, "I have never willingly planted a thorn in the breast of any man." No man ever served human brotherhood more truly than Abraham Lincoln. As we read his works and addresses, even his debates with Stephen Douglas, and search his record, we never find a trace of demagoguery, or Marxian ideology, or of anything but utter fairness, inspired and guided by deep wisdom. For Lincoln, the Constitution, the Bill-of-Rights and the Declaration of Independence charted the way to a nobler and freer America. His enforcement of the principles of those sacred documents brought doom to slavery.

In 1854, when it was objected that the course which Lincoln advocated, was wrong, he answered, "I will stand with anybody that is right and part with him when he is wrong." It is an old and familiar story how, with matchless patience and wisdom, he held the conflicting elements in line until at last he was able triumphantly to free the slaves and save the nation. He saw behind the cry of rampant radicals to the deeper and graver issue which transcended all things else. It was the preservation of the republic, with its representative form of government.

Today, the world cries out for statesmanship grounded on moral principles. The problems of today can be met only by men of spiritual insight and moral integrity, men capable of rising above the political tumult and confused thinking of this age; men willing to subordinate their own personal advantages to the welfare of the nation. The leadership of Lincoln is the kind of leadership that America and the world need today — a leadership that gathers together people of every class, race and creed, and unites them into one strong brotherhood. Definitely, it is our duty to pledge ourselves with high fidelity to the sons of America who have given of their "last full measure of devotion," and to the oncoming generations of American children, in the spirit of Lincoln, "with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."



The limitless opportunity for industry in Lincoln's time was the atmosphere in which men built their own security. In Lincoln's judgment, the only purpose of government was to serve the people, not to direct their destiny or master their life. He believed in the dignity and worth of man. He believed that the high purpose of government was to give the individual the opportunity to live and work out his own life under a system in which government was his servant -- not his master.

In 1859-1860, he formulated his views about the rights of capital and the rights of labor with clarity and force. "Labor", he said, "is prior to and independent to capital. Labor can exist without capital, but capital can never exist without labor". In his special message to Congress on July 4th, 1861, he said, "The war is essentially the people's contest for the rights of men and the authority of the people for maintaining in the world that form and substance of government whose leading object is to elevate men to clear the paths of lawful pursuits for all; to afford all an unfettered effort and a fair chance in the race of life." He repeatedly and explicitly declared that the American way of life, which has yielded such splendid consequences for every one of us, and upon which much of the world depends, could never be maintained without the protection and preservation of capital in all its proper rights. He put it this way, "I do not believe in a law to prevent men from getting rich. It would do more harm than good, so while we do not propose any war upon capital, we do wish to allow the humblest man an equal chance to get rich with every one else."

On March 21, 1863, in reply to a committee of working men, he made this remarkable pronouncement, "The strongest bond of human sympathy, outside the family relation, should be one of uniting all working people of all nations and tongues and kindreds. Nor should this lead to a war upon property or the owners of property. Property is the fruit of labor. It is desirable. It is a positive good in the world. Let not him who is houseless pull down the house of another, but let him work diligent-



ly and build for himself; thus, by example, assuring that his own shall be safe from violence when built."

Lincoln believed in a constructive system; that we should shape our governmental policies primarily with a view to the working man and to the growth and expansion of industry. If he were with us today, he would lead us toward a practical idealism in business and industry exactly as he would lead us toward practical idealism in government. He would be successful because, just as he realized that government must be preserved, no matter what the radical fringe demanded, he would never forget the rights of both capital and labor and that industry must be kept as a going concern. What good would it have done to free the slaves if the nation had perished? What would be labor's gain today if the fabric of American industry should be shattered?

Self-reliance, individual initiative, and a man's right to enjoy his own honest earnings, have always been the great American privileges. They made newsboys into business men, shop workers into industrial giants, and agriculturalists out of chore boys. There were no restrictions on ability. That is the way we must keep it. That is progress. That is free enterprise. That is the American way. That is the America of human brotherhood and free opportunity.

Today, we are living in an age of mass movements and class pressures, an age where the power to destroy has overcome man's ability to defend his heritage or plan his future.

Notwithstanding the fact that, under our representative form of government, we have achieved the highest degree of prosperity ever attained in any part of the world, and despite the fact that we are called upon to feed and finance a large part of the world, we hear little about devotion to the Constitution or the sacredness of our Bill-of-Rights. Moreover, we are compelled to combat ever-growing vicious propaganda about the American capitalistic system and class injustice -- propaganda which has for its purpose the destruction of religion and the demoralization of our way of life.



We are living in an age where purpose gives way to expediency, where there is a hue and cry for a government-managed economy. For years we have ignored the products of our heritage. It was sabotaged when we took in an oversupply of imported social and intellectual ideas and standards. Thus, we dissipated the heritage of freedom, of law and order, that came to us from hardworking, faithful men and women who believed in the principles and concepts of government as laid down by Washington, Jefferson and Lincoln.

We have been proceeding upon the philosophy that government is something more than the citizens of government, that it is something distinctive from the people themselves. This, in short, is totalitarian philosophy. Call it what you will, it is gnawing at the vitals of our constitutional and representative form of government.

We all want social security, but with the maximum degree of individual freedom. Yet, government cannot continue to provide social benefits unless at the same time it provides economic opportunities. Government has no resources of its own. All it spends, all it gives away, it has taken from some citizen. It cannot continue to spend and give away unless there is a continually expanding economy where production and more production are permitted to grow unfettered. The philosophy of taxing and spending will eventually destroy America unless we return to the philosophy of Lincoln.

International good-will can never be bought over the counter with American dollars. Bureaucracy, paternalism, communism or a planned economy were never in Lincoln's vocabulary. They are abhorrent to our Constitution and to representative government. They do not tell the story of the American way. We would like to come to the relief of freedom-loving nations of Europe, and we will assist them to rehabilitate themselves for the preservation of the human race, but international good-will can never be attained except through fair and honest dealings. The faith, the philosophy



of Lincoln must find a place in the hearts of men of today. It can lead us from chaos to order. It can keep the social needs of the people from yielding to the selfish motives of a few. It can inspire business, labor and industry to move into the creative pioneer territory that lies ahead. Definitely, the philosophy of individual opportunity and the dignity of man must have a rebirth. It is our task to dedicate our lives to keep inviolate the blessings of freedom for which Lincoln gave his life.

Today, as in Lincoln's time, the issue is freedom; freedom to live, to speak, to worship, to work, all without regimentation. One of the present-day obstacles to unity and confidence is the failure of government to take our people into its confidence and tell them the truth. That failure has created confused thinking and discord. The American people know what they want. Government must have faith in their common sense, faith in their ability to reach correct conclusions when they know the facts and have an opportunity to express themselves. They want a fair treatment of labor. They demand it. They want industry to be kept in a position where it can demonstrate the same brilliant capacity for production which won the war. Yes, they want competency in government. Make no mistake — they demand it. The average citizen is asking for the same opportunity for his children and their children's children which he has enjoyed. Our Constitution, with its divisions of power between the Executive, Legislative and Judicial branches of government, with the support of the people, whom Lincoln trusted, kept the country united in his day and it will keep this nation from turning to the left in our day. No man or group of men has ever been able to substitute himself or his group for the institutions by which freedom has been preserved in America.

My friends, the great purposes of government, now, as in Lincoln's time, are to provide for the well-being of our people. Now, as in Lincoln's time, we can carry out those purposes only by taking an active interest in government, local, state and



federal. That must become the serious business and duty of every citizen. We have always been a great and rugged people, ready to give everything for liberty if need be. It is a high privilege that we in our time are being called upon today to sustain freedom as no generation has been called upon for a long, long time. All about us we see men endeavoring to dig up the roots of men's faith in God, and in man as a sovereign being, in one country after another. They want a new civilization, based upon the assertion that man was created for the state. They want to build up an empire for the domination of the world. They are the enemies of freedom, the enemies of God. Ours is the duty to re-establish and re-light the Lamps of Liberty on earth. That can only be possible if we maintain America in all its strength, in all its productiveness — in all its freedom. The closer we can keep to the principles of Abraham Lincoln, the nearer we shall be to that goal.

- - X - -







